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The Ministry of Healing

Care of the sick has been a responsibility of the Christian churches since Jesus healed the blind, the lame, and the afflicted. Professional and scientific care of the sick is, however, a comparatively new service. In pioneer times, a kindly friend or neighbor might visit the sick or give aid in nursing; not until after the Civil War were hospitals considered civilian necessities. The early hospitals were ill-equipped, and patients often had less care and poorer food than at home. With the increase in surgery and the evolution of asepsis and anesthesia, hospitals became necessary, and the churches emphasized the ministry of healing.

At first, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Iowa seems to have given its support to Wesley Hospital in Chicago, for in 1893 the Iowa Conference voted to recommend this Methodist institution to members of the Iowa churches and to permit agents to solicit funds for it. Soon afterward, the Conference extended the same recognition to Asbury Hospital at Minneapolis. In 1897 the Upper Iowa Conference appropriated \$300 to endow a bed at Wesley Hospital and \$300 additional, if funds became available, for a similar gift to Asbury Hospital.

The first Methodist hospital in Iowa was started in 1901 in Des Moines, in the building formerly occupied by the Callanan School for Girls. In the beginning, this Iowa Methodist Hospital had only seven beds, but it grew rapidly. In recognition of the fact that the hospital gave free care to ministers and their wives, the Upper Iowa Conference gave \$500 to furnish a room. By 1909 the Iowa Methodist Hospital had a new six-story building with 125 beds and was caring for 4,000 patients each year. Today its property is valued at more than \$1,250,000. Until 1920 it was jointly supported by the four annual conferences, but at that time the Northwest Iowa Conference decided to support a hospital of its own. Two years later the Upper Iowa Conference gave its support to a similar undertaking.

The Methodist Hospital at Sioux City had its beginning as St. John's Hospital, founded by Dr. William Jepson. In 1919 Dr. Jepson offered this institution to the Northwest Iowa Conference, and at the Conference session held at Humboldt, in 1920, a committee reported plans for a hospital with 250 beds. The beginning, however, was made in a small building, with one doctor and an indebtedness of \$5,000. In 1924 the trustees purchased a new site, formerly occupied by the Samaritan Hospital, and a year later a new building was dedicated. The plant is now valued at more than \$426,000.

A third hospital — St. Luke's at Cedar Rapids — was given to the Upper Iowa Conference in 1922. This institution began in 1876, financed by a Charity Ball — but not by the Methodist Church. It was in charge of Grace Protestant Episcopal Church, and the cornerstone was laid on May 4, 1884. Hospitals, however, cost money, and a considerable debt had been incurred. Grace Church offered the institution to any organization which could finance a good hospital.

Bishop Homer C. Stuntz encouraged the Upper Iowa Conference to accept the offer, and on October 2, 1922, St. Luke's Hospital began operation as a Methodist-sponsored institution. Since that time a new wing has been built, and a financial campaign has helped to liquidate the debt and pay expenses. As the second half of the twentieth century begins, a new unit, costing \$1,250,000, is being built.

An offshoot of the hospital responsibilities of the Methodist Church is the White Cross, organized in 1921 with Bishop Stuntz as its first president. White Cross serves as an agency for the collection of money for hospital services provided by Methodist institutions.

One institution is maintained by Iowa Methodists for needy children. For some time prior to 1914 an organization known as "The Women's Rescue Society" operated a home in Dubuque for unmarried mothers and their babies. In 1914 the

home was about to be closed for lack of funds, and the building was offered to any Protestant organization which would keep it up. The offer was accepted by Miss Anna B. Cook, a Methodist deaconess, who operated the home for a time with the assistance of St. Luke's Methodist Church and other Protestant churches. Interest was heightened by the disclosure of an unsavory "baby farm" in Dubuque. Renamed the "Hillcrest Baby Fold," this institution, sheltering annually an average of thirty-three infants and children, is one of the objects of benevolence of the North Iowa Conference. A small fee is charged for board if those responsible are able to pay. The buildings, valued at more than \$40,000, stand on Asbury Road.

As the number of aged persons in the state or community increases, and the housing space tends to decrease, the problem of caring for old people has become more acute. The Methodist Church is attempting to help meet this problem by opening two homes for aged Methodists and Methodist preachers — Friendship Haven at Fort Dodge and Wesley Acres in Des Moines.